



These two know blue catfish are bad for the Bay.

Mike Green

INVASIVE DELICACIES

Blue & flathead catfish

By Joe Evans

The first thing to know about blue and flathead catfish is that they are delicious. (Check out marylandseafood.org for recipes!) The next important fact is that you are being environmentally helpful when you catch, cook and eat them.

An appetite for the Chesapeake

Blue and flathead catfish are invasive species not native to Maryland. They were brought to Virginia in the 1970s and 80s from waters west of the Appalachian Mountains like the Mississippi River before biologists fully understood the impacts of non-native, invasive fish.

While blue catfish are now in most of the major tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay, flatheads have found ideal conditions in the Occoquan and lower Susquehanna Rivers. Recently, they have turned up in the nontidal Potomac River near Williamsport.

Voracious predators, blue catfish dominate other fish populations wherever they take hold. They are opportunistic

feeders that grow to enormous sizes. The largest one recorded was 143 pounds, caught on a North Carolina lake in 2011. Locally, the Virginia and Maryland records are a 102-pound fish caught in the James River in 2009, and an 84-pounder caught in the Potomac in 2012, respectively.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration categorizes these fish as invasive because they are “alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm.” The Chesapeake Bay Program and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission have recognized the need to address the threat to native species by working to reduce the invasives’ ranges and populations.

Curbing that appetite

As part of an awareness campaign developed by DNR, signs identifying the fish and cautioning anglers of their potential to do harm have been posted at

more than 150 water access points across the State.

While catfish certainly expand their range by swimming and reproducing, anglers can also cause them to spread by catching them in one body of water and releasing them in another. DNR encourages anglers to keep all blue and flathead catfish they catch, except for those out of the Patuxent River with pink tags, which are part of a Smithsonian Environmental Research Center survey.

It’s important to understand that transporting fish from one body of water to another is illegal in both Maryland and Virginia, and the fine for moving them is up to \$2,500. The number to call to report any suspicion of illegal transport in Maryland (including blue and flathead catfish as well as northern snakeheads and crayfish) is 800-635-6124.

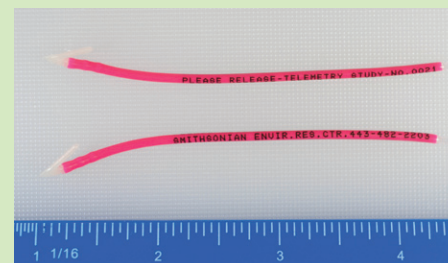
Turning invasives into positives

Both blue and flathead catfish as well as the northern snakehead are eligible



Identification signs posted statewide

DNR



Smithsonian tags, indicating the fish included in the Environmental Research Center survey

Mary Groves



Angler shows off a pair of blue catfish.

Charles Vinson

species in a new Invasive Species Award component of the Maryland Fishing Challenge. The fish must be kept to qualify for a chance to win a prize.


Anglers may enter by posting their catches on the Invasive section of the DNR Angler’s Log (dnr.maryland.gov); by catching a new State record; or through the DNR Angler Award Program. Blue catfish must measure at least 40 inches,

and flatheads must measure at least 34 inches.

Multiple entries are allowed, but an individual fish can only be entered once. DNR will randomly select the prize winners in September. Learn more at dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/challenge ■

Joe Evans is the Communications and Public Affairs Coordinator with DNR’s Fisheries Service.

Because catfish can accumulate chemicals in their tissues as they grow, The Maryland Department of the Environment provides consumption guidelines on how to enjoy eating these invasive catfish while minimizing health risks.

Maryland Fish Consumption Advisories					
Statewide Fresh Water, Estuarine and Marine Waters					
Recommended Meal Size: 8 oz - General Population and Women; 3 oz - Children					
NOTE: Consumption recommendations based on spacing of meals to avoid elevated exposure levels					
1 Women = of childbearing age (women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, or are nursing)					
2 Children = all young children up to age 6					
♥ = Fish contains more than 1g beneficial fatty acids in a fillet the size of 2 decks of cards					
Contaminant present in fish: * Mercury Δ PCBs + Pesticides					
Species	Waterbody		Recommended Meals/Month		
			General Population	Women ¹	Children ²
 Blue Catfish	301 Bridge to DC Line ^Δ	12-15"	4	4	4
		15-24"	2	2	1
		24-30"	1	1	1 every other month
		>30"	Avoid	Avoid	Avoid



Flathead catfish

David Wagner